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[Mary Siporin]

[??]

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Title Stockyard worker's job.

Place of origin Chicago, Illinois Date 4/19/39

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Project worker Betty Burke

Project editor

Remarks

W3615

Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FORM A

Circumstances of Interview Industrial [?]

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

670 Words

May 18 1939

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

ADDRESS 1339 South Troy Street

DATE April 19, 1939

SUBJECT Stockyard worker's job

Library of Congress

1. Date and time of interview April 14, 1939, 6 p.m. and after
2. Place of interview 6401 Ellis Avenue
3. Name and address of informant Mary Siporin, 6401 Ellis Avenue
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. None
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Lives with husband in kitchenette apt. (one room) in rooming house. Outside yards district. Says when she lived right there on top of the yards, there on Ashland, she used to get the cheapest toughest rottenest meats. Handling the best meat in the world at work and when you come home you can't buy a decent piece of meat for love or money in the whole neighborhood. Says housing facilities are terrible and rents very unreasonable and high, in spite of the fact that fire hazards and unsanitary, inadequate plumbing, if any, is the rule.

FORM B

Personal History of Informant

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

Library of Congress

ADDRESS 1339 South Troy Street

DATE April 19, 1939

SUBJECT Packinghouse worker

NAME OF INFORMANT Mary Siporin

1. Ancestry Polish, American born
2. Place and date of birth - Back of the yards, 24 years ago
3. Family - Three grown brothers, one crippled. The other two have worked in the yards for years. One hates the yards, always has. Father used to work there. Too old now, for that kind of work.
4. Places lived in, with dates - Back of the yards until a year after marriage. Went to France with her husband for a short time. Lives near Chicago University at present.
5. Education, with dates - Eighth grade grammar school. Went to work in the yards, 10 hours a day, came home, ate, went to Englewood nite school, 3 hours a nite, 3 days a week. Did that for four years.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Has worked in more than ten different departments in the yards.
7. Special skills and interests - Packinghouse union first interest. Belongs to progressive youth groups. Supports new housing project for the yards district, on a community committee working for it.
8. Community and religious activities - Raised as strict Catholic, not religious now.

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9. Description of informant - Blond, big and soft looking. Sociable, likes to get around. Talkative. Usually has all sorts of meetings keep her busy evenings

10. Other Points gained in interview

FORM C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

CHICAGO FOLKSTUFF

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

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NAME OF WORKER Betty Burke

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I'm in the sliced bacon. The work is very simple but very fast. They brought a lot of new machinery in. The man who makes all that detailed machinery is only a worker. He gets paid a little more and the girls who lost their jobs because of his junk, Jesus Christ you couldn't count 'em. In sliced bacon where there were 20 girls working there's 6 now. Once I went up to that guy, he was on the floor, and I asked him how much the machinery was stepping up production. My God, kid, you should have seen the superintendent rush

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up and tell him not to talk to me and for me to mind my own business and get back to my table. Then for instance here's one thing you ought to put down about sliced bacon department in Swift's. I used to think Swift's was the cream. You know, they pat you on the back and make out you're just one of the family, a great big happy family. Lots of the girls go for that. And then they start laying them off right and left and some of these girls even then will say 'well, they were nice about it, they said they were sorry to have to do it.' Anyway, in sliced bacon, that's supposed to be the cleanest, lightest place to work in, why they wouldn't take on a Negro girl if she was a college graduate. There's plenty of them doing all kinds of dirty jobs in the yards but sliced bacon, oh, that's too good to give a colored girl. In Swift's now, they're laying off this way too. Say if a married couple work there they lay off one of them. There's many like that, you know.

Reminds me of Wilson's. Boy, what a craphole! In '34 they had me going like a clock 10 and 12 hours a day. I used to get home so tired I'd just sit down at the table and cry like a baby. That's where I was blacklisted. Some spy found out I was friendly to the union, you know. It took me a long time to catch on to why they kept laying me off. They broke up my seniority that way, see, and then finally they wouldn't put me back at all. Well, I went to see the head employment manager, I didn't waste my time fooling around with the foremen and the small time guys around the office. I asked him how it was that I wasn't put on when I knew other girls were working, girls in my department. He just looked at me a while. Then he said 'We've got the girls in that department like this,' and he clenched his fist. 'That's the way we'll keep them. You couldn't do a thing with them, even if you had the chance—which you won't have. Of course, you can go out and sit in the employment office and wait. Come very day if you want to. That's all he said, didn't mention union, 3 organizing, not in so many words, but I knew I was through as far as Wilson's was concerned.

Here's the psychology of a girl at the yards. She tries to forget she works in the yards after work. She'll tell people she works in an office, at best, she'll say she's an office worker in the yards. She'll go around with everyone except yards girls. That's the single ones. Married ones are different. Of course the union has changed that attitude to a certain

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extent. But say like in Swift's, see, Swift beat the union to the draw. They raised the wages before the union got established there and so the workers think Swift's is the nuts. The fail to realize that if it hadn't been for the union they wouldn't have got that in the first place. And if the union don't catch hold there they'll get out so fast they won't know what struck them.

You know, thousands of yard workers have occupational diseases. Rheumatism, varicose veins, cardiac conditions, all those sicknesses are widespread. There's a rash they get called hog's itch. It looks awful, irritating and sore, and it spreads. A fellow I know had to quit his job 3 years ago and the doctors can't cure him. He can't work. Lots of them get that.

My brother worked in the hog kill for 8 years and work's getting so scarce they're starting to cut into the 8 -year seniority bunch. He [?] was lucky they just transferred him to beef kill. In 1919 my brother walked out with the others, you know, and while he was walking through the yards a watchman called out 'who goes there'. Well, my brother 4 was damned if he was going to report to a squirty watchman and so he didn't answer. The watchman shot him in the leg, put him in the hospital for a year. You'd think that'd tech him something but it didn't. He never joined the union. He's just a suckhole for the company. He sticks up for Swift & Company like he owned the damn place. That's all right, though. We can get along without guys like him.